Navigating Homelessness

By Margaret King

We are excited to partner with the City of Seattle and Operation Sack Lunch on a new and innovative shelter program for 75 people that we will be launching in 2017, DESC’s Navigation Center.

In June 2016, Mayor Murray announced funding for a low barrier shelter for folks living in encampments, modeled after the San Francisco Navigation Center. The city solicited proposals this fall and DESC was selected as the operator, in partnership with Operation Sack Lunch, who will provide meals.

The Navigation Center represents an exciting opportunity to create an even lower barrier overnight shelter than we’ve done before - and ours are already the lowest barrier shelters in our community. At the Navigation Center, people will be welcomed as singles or in pairs, with pets, with no curfew, food on demand, and with access to secure storage for large quantities of belongings. The idea is to create a safe, indoor, staffed space that people living outdoors will accept, and then to build on those relationships to help guests stabilize in more permanent housing settings and care as needed. This will allow us to serve a portion of the homeless population that has been staying away from existing shelters.

Onsite staff will include a Project Manager and supervisors, milieu service coordinators, and intensive case managers providing wrap-around services. There will also be DESC mental health and chemical dependency staff sited at the Center, and visiting providers we already partner with such as the King County Veterans Program.

The City of Seattle is identifying a usable site for the Navigation Center, and we plan to open this new project as soon as the site and the staff are in place. You can expect to see more progress announcements and other information on our website and social media accounts in the coming months.
From the Executive Director

In these newsletters, we typically tell you about our programs, and the people whose lives have stabilized in our care. We say less about the things we do to ensure our work is effective and continually improving. Program evaluation may not be the most exciting topic, but it is exciting to us to test our pioneering approaches, and to share the results with others so that they can gain expertise and understanding.

This behind-the-scenes work is one of things that sets DESC apart and directly informs the dialogue about how to best serve vulnerable people.

We are continually evaluating programs at DESC. Our robust client service database allows us to explore many different challenges facing our clients from many angles, and see how we are doing on a number of key performance indicators. We have established successful research partnerships with academic researchers to formally examine not only what outcomes our work is achieving, but also find out why it works when it does, and what areas still need improvement.

Today, we have five active research evaluation projects on a range of...
topics. The newest one recently received a sizable funding award from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development to study how different housing options and settings work for our most vulnerable clients. Led by Dr. Molly Brown of DePaul University and collaborators with faculty appointments at the University of Washington and Columbia University, we are investigating something that could make a big difference to the work we do: how do you determine the “right” housing intervention for the vulnerable people we serve?

We have long experienced that many of our clients thrive in the highly supportive buildings we create and operate, while others seem to do best in less supportive settings with occasional visits by our staff. But matching the right setting to the right person at the right time isn’t always obvious. Through this randomized controlled trial, we expect to gain some insights that will improve our work and hopefully be useful to others around the country as well.

The research work we engage in takes a considerable amount of time and effort to carry out, but I think it’s worth it. Our long involvement in research has established DESC as a results-driven innovator. Having this level of analysis of our work produces knowledge we can share with others (for example, through many peer-reviewed journal articles), but as importantly, it allows us to focus on what we are doing and see how we can do it better.

Upcoming Event

Gimme Shelter | April 28th 2017

The 9th annual Gimme Shelter benefit event will be held at the Showbox SoDo on Friday, April 28th, 2017! We’re excited to announce that this year, we’re combining the concert with our annual gala to create a new event with a robust and exciting program. Keep your eyes out for our save the date announcements, and be sure to stay tuned to our social media channels for regular updates.
Introducing Michelle Janson, our newest director

DESC is happy to welcome Michelle Janson to the newly created role of Director of Program Integration and Support. Michelle will oversee cross-departmental activities and collaboration throughout the agency.

With an academic background in engineering and business administration, and a work background in operations and management, Michelle brings a wealth of experience in performance improvement and organizational development. She has a passion for helping people experiencing homelessness, and was attracted to DESC by our comprehensive approach to serving our clients.

Michelle is excited to help ensure that DESC’s teams are making their highest contributions to the things that will make the greatest difference in our community.

Welcome to DESC, Michelle!

Congratulations to Representative Nicole Macri

Huge congratulations to Representative Nicole Macri, DESC’s Deputy Director for Strategy, on her successful campaign for a seat in the state House of Representatives!

Nicole will be representing Washington’s 43rd district, and intends to continue her decades of advocacy for homeless and low-income individuals. For those of you who know how important Nicole is to DESC’s work, do not worry. Although she will take leave from DESC while the legislature is in session, she is staying on at DESC and will return to her regular duties.
Celebrating DESC’s Champions

A big thank you to all who attended the Breakfast of Champions last October to help us celebrate those champions who fight for us all year. The exciting program included awards, a brand new video premiere, and words from Seattle Fire Chief Harold Scoggins, who DESC has been partnering with to better serve our clients who need emergency services.

AWARD WINNERS

Employer of the Year
SightConnection

Outstanding Group
The Holy Rollers

Extraordinary Team Member
Elizabeth Werley-Prieto

Extraordinary DESC Team
216 Peer Specialist Team

Client Care Collaboration
Harborview Medical Center: Elise Chayet and Ed Dwyer-O’Connor

Community Partner
Seattle Fire Department
The Virtual Reality of Housing First

Like many of our clients, Shawn Wilson was homeless for years and lived with an untreated mental illness. It wasn’t until he found DESC that he got the support he needed to get off the streets and into housing. With the help of filmmakers Geoffrey Pepos and Cynthia Knutsen, and support from Bank of America Merrill Lynch, Shawn tells his story in this brand new video. If you have a smartphone with a gyroscope, you can even watch the video in virtual reality mode. You can find the video at http://bit.ly/Housing1stVR

1811 Mural Unveiling

Our 1811 Eastlake building recently unveiled a new “Peace Quilt” mural designed and painted by tenants. The mural came about as part of a multi-year partnership with the University of Washington-Harborview Medical Center’s Harm Reduction Research and Treatment (HaRRT) Center’s Life Enhancing Alcohol-Management Program (LEAP). New research by HaRRT indicates that tenants who took part in LEAP activities - on average - were drinking less and participated in more enrichment activities overall than tenants at buildings without LEAP.
As you can see from the photo, construction on the new Estelle building is underway! The 91-unit building is scheduled to open next fall.

Project on N. 96th
Thanks to new funding from the City of Seattle, King County, and the State of Washington, we are moving forward with a brand new housing project on N. 96th St. in Seattle. This new building will house 98 people living with mental illness and other disabilities.

Community Resource Specialist
In early 2016, DESC partnered with the Seattle Public Library (SPL) to place a DESC staff member at the Central Library downtown. This Community Resource Specialist, capably filled by Hallie Cranos, provides information and referrals to connect library patrons with services and programs that can help them overcome barriers to meeting their basic needs. SPL and DESC are well-situated to collaborate in offering this type of assistance to patrons, as social service needs are sometimes made apparent by the ways in which patrons use library resources, and the type of services and assistance they seek. By providing specific assistance in this area, we believe that this program will enhance the SPL’s ability to support all of their patrons in attaining access to educational, economic, social, and civic participation in society.

Services and Housing to Access Recovery
In Fall 2016, DESC partnered with King County’s Behavioral Health and Recovery Division to obtain funding from the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration for a new program called Services and Housing to Access Recovery (SHARP). Through this endeavor, DESC will provide Assertive Community Treatment and permanent supportive housing in geographically underserved regions. Approximately 350 chronically homeless adults experiencing co-occurring serious mental illnesses and substance use disorders will be served by SHARP over the three-year life of the grant. We are joined on this exciting project by Valley Cities Behavioral Health Care.
Donor Spotlight

TEW Foundation

Big thanks to the TEW Foundation for a $100,000 grant to help us purchase bed bug-resistant bed sets for the tenants of the Morrison. We anticipate repeating the great success we had in eradicating the pests from our main shelter after introducing similar beds.

Karin Weekly

We’re so grateful to our volunteer and donor Karin Weekly - who found a beautiful piano to replace a severely water-damaged one in The Morrison. Karin regularly plays for and teaches classes to the tenants there, and her generous gift arrived just in time for the holidays!